

New Hampshire Special Education On-site Evaluation Report

Merrimack School District, SAU 26

**James O'Neil, Superintendent
David St. Jean, Special Education Director**

Final Report

May 4, 1999

Evaluation Conducted on February 10-11, 1999

Team Members:

Harvey Harkness, Chairperson
Ben Augello
Joseph Bradley
Karen Burkush
Margaret Edgecomb
Mike Fitzpatrick
Jane Murray
Patricia Taussig
Randy Young

Maria Barry
Terry Brune
Joseph Denning
Kathy Fagan
Jo-Ann Mulligan
Nancy Sewell
Cathy Tsiros

New Hampshire Special Education On-site Evaluation Report

Table of Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Status of Corrective Actions from Previous Program Approval Visit
- III. Issues of Significance
- IV. Citations to the New Hampshire Standards for the Education of Students with Disabilities, Adopted October 1996

(Commendations, Citations, and Suggestions for each program)

Note: It should be noted that suggestions are not considered corrective actions and therefore are given as technical assistance. The district is not mandated to implement them.

New Hampshire Special Education Program Approval Summary Evaluation Report

Merrimack School District, SAU 26

I. INTRODUCTION:

A New Hampshire Special Education Program Approval visit was conducted in SAU 26 comprised of the following schools: James Mastricola Elementary School, James Mastricola Middle School, Reeds Ferry School, Thornton's Ferry School and Merrimack High School. The program approval team met on February 10 and 11, 1999 in order to review the status of Special Education services being provided to eligible students.

Activities related to this evaluation included the close review of all the teaching certifications of special education staff, analysis of SPEDIS data and random inspection of student records. Interviews were held with the special education director, building principals, regular and special education teachers and related service personnel and administrators as time and availability permitted. In addition, the team conducted parent interviews via phone. Throughout the visit the team had full cooperation from the school personnel and this helpfulness was greatly appreciated.

The report which you are about to read represents the consensus of all the members of the visiting team. Please keep in mind that this is a "report for exception", meaning that only exceptions to the N.H. State Standards have been addressed. If a component is not mentioned, that does not mean that the team did not review it; it just means that there were no citations of noncompliance to the Standards found in that particular area.

II. STATUS OF PREVIOUS ON-SITE: *Conducted March 8-9, 1994*

The findings listed in the report of the previous program approval visit of March 8-9 1994 were reviewed and determined to have been corrected. These findings were as follows:

- Compliance of out-of-district files
- Preschool referrals needed to be processed appropriately and monitored for the provision of related services in isolation.
- Teachers of suspected disabilities must attend all evaluation/placement/IEP meetings.
- Compliance with time requirements for referrals and with the document process.
- Maintain documentation of LEA involvement in educational planning and decision making.

Each of these citations were reviewed and were determined to have been successfully corrected. The staff of SAU 26 are commended for their efforts in addressing the areas of non-compliance identified in 1994.

III. ISSUES OF SIGNIFICANCE:

No significant issues of compliance were identified during this monitoring visit.

COMMENDATIONS, CITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS: All Programs

COMENDATIONS:

The visiting team was unanimously impressed with the high quality of services provided by the Merrimack School District. Outstanding characteristics of the district's educational programming for students with disabilities include:

- Excellent communication between parents and staff
- Very competent and skilled staff
- Proactive discipline program based on productive experiences for students with behavioral issues
- Extensive staff development opportunities focusing on improving student performance
- Genuine collaboration between parents and staff in the development and implementation of student IEP's.
- Strong and consistent leadership at the SAU level has resulted in increased resources for students with disabilities.
- Schools are positive and seek ways to improve education for all students. Building principals are commended for their leadership.
- The director of special education is commended for his leadership and positive vision of education for all students.

CITATIONS: (in numerical order)

No District-Wide Citations

SUGGESTIONS:

MERRIMACK PRESCHOOL & KINDERGARTEN

PROGRAM(S) VISITED: 1) Preschool 2) Kindergarten

COMMENDATIONS:

- The district is committed to providing preschool programming in inclusive settings as evidenced by the working relationship with Kids Inn.
- The staff to student ratios are very low. Therapists are also in the classrooms for most of the therapy time, which further reduces the ratios.
- The staff, in general, are very experienced and have longevity with the district. They are invested in collaboration and seem to enjoy their jobs. The turn-over rate is very low.
- Related services are delivered in an integrated model. All staff have the benefit of observing therapies and learn to carry-over strategies used by therapists. Children are learning functional skills within a regular classroom setting.
- The physical set-up at the high school facility (preschool) is adequate and promotes provision of comprehensive services. There is a motor/sensory area adjacent to the preschool classroom, there is a small quiet space for low-sensory activities within one classroom and the two preschool classrooms are connected. The playground is inside an enclosed area and accessible immediately outside the two classrooms. There are child-sized toilets and sinks within the rooms. Children do not have to leave the preschool area to enter the high school except during arrival and dismissal. This space is ideally suited to a preschool program which serves children with disabilities.
- The district appears to be flexible in addressing the unique needs of students in preschool/kindergarten. They have created a longer, more intensive program for students with PDD. They also allow children who appear to be "at risk" to access services from the OT/PT; therapy time is not solely driven by the number of units on SPEDIS. Parents who refuse placement in the district's preschool or kindergarten programs are offered alternative services in the community setting for their children.
- Materials and supplies are sufficient.

CITATIONS:

Ed#1125.03 2 files: Written prior notice missing from file.

SUGGESTIONS:

- The district should consider maintaining the high quality, exemplary physical space at the high school which currently houses the preschool program. It is clearly a model program
- The district should consider setting a cap on the number of students in each classroom and commit to maintaining a ratio of 50/50 students with disabilities and typically-developing students. A maximum of 15-16 students would be reasonable.
- Alternate plans for students who are identified late in the school year should be developed (community placements, playgroups, run by teacher and therapist) if it is not feasible to open up an additional classroom.

MASTRICOLA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

PROGRAM(S) VISITED: 1) PASS 2) Regular Education 3) Speech/Language
4) Resource Room

COMMENDATIONS:

- Student records were in good order overall and very organized.
- The staff are knowledgeable and provide a child centered and innovative environment.
- Support is adequate and appropriate.
- The collaboration between case managers and classrooms teachers is commended.
- The special education coordinator is effective and keeping the department moving in positive manner.
- There is a good working inclusion model and positive school climate at Masticola Elementary School.

CITATIONS:

Ed#1107.02 More clarity is needed on referral dates when received from outside the district.

Ed#1102.35 Identification of LEA representative at meeting is needed.

SUGGESTIONS:

- The district may wish to consider providing additional staff to implement "Project Read" more effectively.
- The provision of additional OT services is recommended.

REEDS FERRY SCHOOL

PROGRAM(S) VISITED: 1) Resource Room 2) PDD Program 3) Inclusionary / M01

COMMENDATIONS:

- Student IEPs are very thorough and descriptive.
- Staff are high skilled, motivated and enthusiastic.
- The administrative staff are involved, supportive and also enthusiastic.
- There is great collaboration among staff; everyone works together very well.
- Staff are provided with lots of meeting time to ensure that all services are coordinated.
- There is ample space and materials for activities.
- The staff are commended for their effort in ensuring that all services work together to assist students with their academic progress.

CITATIONS:

- Ed#1107.05(k) 3 files: Evaluations not completed within 45 days, although extensions were signed by parents.
- Ed#1107.07(c) 1 file: No evidence that LEA was present at evaluation meeting.
- Ed#1123.04(10) 1 file: No record of disclosure in file.
- Ed#1125.04(a) 1 file: No evidence of written consent to evaluate for 3 year evaluation.
- Ed#1109.03(a-d) 1 file: No evidence of regular education teacher on IEP development team.
- Ed#1109.04(a) 2 files: Did not contain clear evidence of 10 day written notice of IEP meeting.
- Ed#1111.01 3 files: Did not contain evidence that Extended School Year programming was considered.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Paperwork for placement needs to be better organized and completed in its entirety. Documents appear to be done at the IEP meeting, but the paperwork does not always clearly reflect this. There is no written prior notice for placement.
- Meeting notices need to be clearer in terms of when the parent was notified; several indicated that the parent had been notified before the paperwork was sent.
- Work towards completing the Extended School Year process in a timely manner.

THORNTON'S FERRY SCHOOL

PROGRAM(S) VISITED: 1) PDD Program 2) Language Based Program 3) Resource Room

COMMENDATIONS:

- Student records were well organized.
- Staff are provided with good professional development opportunities.
- Staff are happy and enthusiastic and are provided with adequate equipment and materials.
- The PDD program provides a very active community component.
- The entire staff are provided training for "Project Read", providing continuity among the schools.
- The language based classroom is an asset for students with reading difficulties.
- There is a positive relationship between regular and special education teachers.
- The principal is strongly invested in special education students and their needs.

CITATIONS:

Ed#1107.05 2 files: Evaluations were not within the 45 day timeline and no evidence of signed extension.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Increased involvement of the one-to-one aides with the special education team is suggested.

MASTRICOLA MIDDLE SCHOOL

PROGRAM(S) VISITED: 1) Language Based Program 2) Life Skills 3) PASS
 4) Resource Room 5) After School Program

COMMENDATIONS:

- The staff are positive, enthusiastic and invested in helping students to achieve.
- The reading recovery program is having positive results with students.
- Student records are clear and well organized.
- The district expends a lot of effort in completing thorough evaluations.
- The district is commended for committing a special education teacher to every team.
- There is strong administrative support.

CITATIONS:

None

SUGGESTIONS:

- Staff might want to consider using a model such as "Circle of Friends" to encourage peer relationships/socialization at the middle school level.
- Provide computers in classrooms not just in computer lab.
- Additional speech personnel are suggested for testing and general services.

MERRIMACK HIGH SCHOOL

PROGRAM(S) VISITED: 1) GET SET 2) PASS 3) Academic Assistance

COMMENDATIONS:

- The school is a quiet, clean and has a friendly environment for students and staff.
- Communication among staff and the special education department is strong.
- The administrative support is exemplary.
- Co-teaching and modifications by some regular ed. teachers is working well.
- The breadth of special education programs provided to students is to be commended.
- The district support for local staff development opportunities is commended.
- The district and staff are very proactive in their response to changes in discipline laws.

CITATIONS:

Ed#1102.35 3 files: The IEP did not include signature of LEA representative.

Ed#1103.03 (a-d) 3 files: Lacking evidence that team composition was appropriate.

Ed#1109.04(a) 3 files: No evidence in file regarding 10-day notice of meeting.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Consider new procedure for file organization.
- Consider reducing the case management load for special educators.
- Consider adding a second transition coordinator (see 1993 recommendation) and additional special ed. secretarial time.
- Maintain a consistent standard that IEP objectives are written in measurable terms.
- Consider adding computers for student use in academic assistance rooms.

OUT-OF-DISTRICT FILES

PROGRAM(S) VISITED: 1) Summit School 2) Lighthouse School 3) Coddington School

COMMENDATIONS:

- Out of district placements are effectively managed and monitored.
- The district coordinator is fully involved with every placement

CITATIONS:

Ed#1125.04 3 files: District procedures need to be updated to comply with current IDEA regulations and new SPEDIS software regarding written consent to evaluate and placement.

Ed#1113.02 1 file: The vocational component of IEP needs to meet IEP requirements for vocational programming.

Ed#1102.35 1 file: Transition requirements need to be addressed and clearly specified.

Ed#1109.01(b,i,j) 1 file: Specific goals and short-term objectives, evaluation criteria, schedules and procedures need to be developed pursuant to current IDEA requirements. Service providers need to be more clearly identified.

SUGGESTIONS:

None

ADDENDUM

JAMES O. MONITORING PROGRAM

Merrimack School District, SAU 26

Student File Review

Case Study Document

Reimbursement Claim Form

Case Study Addendum Form

<p style="text-align: center;">ADDENDUM JAMES O. MONITORING PROGRAM</p>

Merrimack School District, SAU 26

COMMENDATIONS:

- Files were systematically organized and maintained under proper security.
- The management of the juvenile court process by the District Coordinator is thorough and effectively administered.
- The District Coordinator acts as case manager for each James O' student. She attends all meetings and carries out her responsibilities in an outstanding manner.

CITATIONS:

Ed #1109.01(c,d) 2 files: Need to specify student's participation in regular education classes.

Ed#1109.01(I) 2 files: Evaluation criteria procedures and schedules need to be specified.

SUGGESTIONS:

None